

Intern-led research takes center stage at 2013 summer poster session

By Ian Thomas

Following a rigorous three months of seminars, workshops, career panels, and research training, the 2013 [NIH Summer Internship Program at NIEHS \(SIP\)](#) at NIEHS drew to a close July 25 with the annual poster session. Held in Rodbell Auditorium, this three-hour event offered students the chance to showcase their newfound research skills, and discuss their work with colleagues and peers.

"It's always a thrill for our staff to walk the aisles at this event and see the incredible work that these kids produce after just a summer of training," said NIEHS Radiation Safety Officer Bill Fitzgerald, during the day's closing remarks. "These students put in a lot of lab time between the months of May and August - a lot of it on their own hours - and that really shows up in the level of quality research that we see here every year."

Learning from the bench

The key component of SIP is its commitment to giving students real, hands-on experience in a world-class biomedical research setting, by pairing them with members of the Institute's intramural research team. Through this mentoring partnership, NIEHS interns learn, firsthand, what it means to conduct experiments and analyze data.

"From day one, they made it clear that it was up to us to step forward and take the initiative to learn," said John Parker, a senior at Elon University whose poster examined the relationship between spatial environments and hippocampal neuron activity in rodents. "From then on, they put the tools in our hands and taught us what we needed to begin generating our own ideas. As internships go, it truly was a fantastic experience."

"John was more of a collaborator than a student on this project," echoed Georgia Alexander, Ph.D., a research fellow in the NIEHS [Synaptic and Developmental Plasticity Group](#) and Parker's mentor. "Some interns are content to follow their mentor around the lab and simply observe, but he was an active contributor throughout this entire process and that really showed in his poster."

Keeping in touch

At the conclusion of the event, Fitzgerald announced the winners of the best poster competition, as determined by a panel of NIEHS scientists, and then offered the 2013 SIP class a final word of advice before dismissing them.

"You've met some extraordinary people during your time here and, whether it's through social media or email, you should try to keep in touch with them," he said. "For all you know, the person sitting beside you today could be your colleague five years from now, or maybe even your boss."

2013 Poster Winners

- Top High School Poster - **Forrest Ashworth**, a graduate of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics - Ashworth F, de Marchena J, Jensen P. 2013. Isolating the Function of Galanin-Expressing Noradrenergic Neurons of the Locus.
- Top College Poster - **Spencer Lacy**, a rising junior at North Carolina State University - Lacy S, House J, Li H, Zeldin D, London S. 2013. Htr4 -/- Mice Exhibit Altered Lung Function Following Bleomycin-Induced Fibrosis.



Lacy, left, and Ashworth accepted their awards for best poster. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

(Ian Thomas is a public affairs specialist with the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison and a regular contributor to the Environmental Factor.)



Fitzgerald congratulated the entire 2013 SIP class. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Parker gestured, enthusiastically, as he discussed his poster. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Alexander described her experience with Parker as a collaborative education. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Scholars Connect intern Mia Burks, from St. Augustine's University, discussed her summer project with Huei-Chen Lao, Ph.D., science education and outreach coordinator on detail in the NIEHS [Office of Science Education and Diversity](#) . (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., left, enjoyed a laugh with intern Trey Saddler, a rising senior at Salish Kootenai College, and his mentor NTP pathologist Darlene Dixon, D.V.M., Ph.D. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



*Intern Rachel Hainline, a rising junior at Columbia University, brought some humor to her explanation of the ways DNA precursor concentrations can affect mutagenesis in *E. coli*. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



Intern Michael Lekwuwa, a rising senior at North Carolina Central University, returned for his second summer at the NIEHS poster competition. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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